

THE WATCH COMMITTEE -- NATIONAL INDICATIONS CENTER

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Attached are [] observations contained in his 5 February Memorandum to the Director of Central Intelligence and comments on each observation. The tabs respond to the numbered observations in [] memorandum.

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RECOMMENDATION

1. As currently operated, the National Indications Center functions more in the nature of a staff of the Watch Committee than as the type of entity normally looked upon as a warning center.

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a. evidently believes that the NIC should operate more in operational intelligence and act as a tactical warning organization.

b. This is in contravention to the mission objective function of DCID 1/5, reaffirmed by the USIB as recently as 7 March 1961. Some elements of the Intelligence Community, not fully aware of the content of DCID 1/5, are prone to consider the NIC as a "secretariat" for the Watch Committee; this is erroneous, the NIC is the operational and administrative support staff for the Watch Committee, ultimately responsible to the USIB.

c. The mission clearly categorizes NIC's operational function in support of the Watch Committee and the USIB as one to provide the earliest possible warning of hostile action, or of impending developments, which endanger the security of the United States. Indications Intelligence techniques and methodologies positively precede in time "Strategic Warning" and "Tactical Warning." The National Indications Center operates on the tenet that its task will have been performed before "Strategic Warning" and "Tactical Warning," as such, are available to "warning centers."

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RECOMMENDATION

2. The National Indications Center is not tied directly to U. S. indications centers deployed throughout the world, even though it is from the latter centers that we might reasonably expect to receive many of our earliest indicators of possible hostile action.



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RECOMMENDATION

3. Because the DIA Indications Center is directly tied to the various military indications centers deployed throughout the world and because the DIA Center has immediately available to it more information involving military indicators than does the National Indications Center, it would seem desirable to explore the feasibility of abolishing the National Indications Center and establishing the Defense Indications Center as the body responsible for supporting the Director of Central Intelligence, the United States Intelligence Board and the Watch Committee in the areas defined in DCID 1/5.



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There is a lack of logical orientation and compatibility in the reasoning process that recommends the disestablishment of the National Indications Center and then attempts to fill this created void in community intelligence machinery with a new "DIA/CIIC-NIC" - which is in effect the recommendation. The NIC/Watch Committee function, reaffirmed several times by the USIB over the past many years, has evolved to its present high level of effectiveness from a crucible of repeated crisis and emergency situations. It does not follow that a new organization, still in process of "shake-down" and depending heavily on the National Indications Center as the focal point of Indications/Intelligence/Information in the Washington Community, is capable of encumbering itself with the task of closely following and analyzing Indicators and Indications in addition to its mission of "strategic" and "tactical" warning collection and analysis. The NIC, as the recognized joint collator of indications intelligence/information for the Watch Committee membership, and in turn the USIB, is by direction contained in NSC 5438 (previously cited) the recipient of all information and materials pertinent to its mission, regardless of source, policy or operational sensitivity. The fact that some elements of the community have not recognized the charge incumbent upon them in this respect does not detract from the need to support with all pertinent information the work of the NIC in its mission of operational support to the Watch Committee and the USIB. The proposed substitution of a "DIA/CIIC-NIC" raises a number of questions when it is realized that this would invest in another agency a unilateral control of warning information which is vital not only to the central and coordinating mission of the Director, Central Intelligence, but to all other Departmental and Agency intelligence functions as well.

RECOMMENDATION

4. In the past some information required by the National Indications Center was not furnished thereto in timely fashion because of the absence of the direct channels referred to above; other information required by the National Indications Center was either not furnished at all or was obtained by the Center on an informal, "unofficial" basis.

In a superficial sense this is true. The so-labeled "exclusive for" or personal "eyes only" intelligence/information held within all intelligence functions of the several departments and agencies has not always been released to the National Indications Center in the past, nor will it necessarily be in the future (despite NSC 5438). Let honesty prevail here--a DIA subordinated "indications center" would be in no better position in this regard. What is important in examining this charge is a realization of the unique role the NIC has been able to play as a central information clearing house and as a means for intelligence coordination in the Washington community. The nature of intelligence duty, coupled with the human compulsion to sound out and coordinate on a significant item or incident, has generally permitted the NIC to learn, within minutes usually, of the item or incident, thus enabling the NIC to perform one of its most arduous and frequently recurring sub-tasks--the production of a community assessment.

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RECOMMENDATION

5. The National Indications Center has never been adequately staffed; it has little or no capability at hand for automatic or other technical processing of intelligence inputs; it is not geared to operate in such manner as to assure that advance indicators of hostile action will be received, evaluated and moved forward to the policy-makers with maximum possible speed.

This comment is inconsistent with the present mission assigned to the NIC by the USIB. The manning authorization and personnel assignment responsibility rests directly on the USIB and USIB agencies and departments. There has long been a clear split within the community as to what "adequate" staffing of NIC would be. Some Watch members have felt NIC was overmanned, others looking toward a full staff on a 24-hour basis regard NIC as undermanned. These differences have never been fully discussed, and until they are no agreement is possible among USIB members who in the last analysis would provide personnel required.

The charge that "the NIC has little or no capability for automatic or other technical processing of intelligence inputs" is true, but then this could be said of the entire intelligence community. A study contract has been made between [redacted] for a system study of indications information and the possibility of greater automation in indications processing. No discussion has yet been held as to USIB funding or compatibility requirements in relation to other systems currently under development.

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Eight years' experience in NIC has developed procedures for prompt evaluation and community assessment of indications information. Given the fact that NIC by itself lacks the authority to forwards its views, or even the information itself, to policy makers with maximum possible speed, this charge is directed more at the Committee system within USIB than at the specific performance of NIC. Under present ground rules any NIC evaluation or NIC-coordinated community assessment necessarily must be blessed by the members of the Watch Committee and often by members of USIB as well, either individually or convened in meetings. These men are busy and well protected from interruptions; it is often extremely difficult to obtain their views or concurrence promptly. This is not their fault; it is the workload they bear; and it is certainly not NIC's. The fact that NIC is used by members of the intelligence community as often as it is to get quick and coordinated community judgments would attest to the fact that, if it isn't perfect, it is still about the most effective mechanism for this purpose that has been developed by the community.